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NECROLOGY.

OVERBECK.* †

Two years ago the answer to the question "Who is the recognized leader in the science of classical archæology" would have been a divided one. Some would have answered Heinrich von Brunn, others would have named Johannes Overbeck. In fact, each needed the



JOHANNES OVERBECK.

other to complete himself: Brunn was the intuitive poet of the science, Overbeck the contemplative artist. Their combined talents and energies

* For such information concerning the subject of this sketch as does not lie within the sphere of my own experience I am indebted to the kindness of Geheimräthin Auguste Overbeck and to Professor Emil Schmidt, Ph. D., her son-in-law.

were required to interpret fully the works of those artists whose chief task it was to put into material forms the conceptions of that array of poets in whom the classic peoples lived. Both men will live long in the grateful memory of classical archæologists and art-critics.

Johannes Adolf Overbeck was born on the 27th of March, 1826, of German parents in the city of Antwerp. He was born not only in an artist-city but also of an artist family. The great historical painter, Johann Friedrich Overbeck, was his uncle, and from him he received his name. Overbeck himself was an artist in his every move and phrase and thought; and from his boyhood art was the subject of his ambition and of his dreams.

While he was yet a child his parents returned to Germany and took up their residence at Hamburg. There he received his preparatory training at the old historic college of the *Johanneum*. Graduating in 1845 he entered at the age of nineteen the University of Bonn. The great lights in the philological faculty at Bonn at that time were Friedrich Ritschl (afterward his colleague in Leipzig) and Friedrich Gottlob Welcker. The deepest impression upon his character was made by Welcker; and it was that same deep-souled, artistic archæologist who gave the direction to the young Overbeck's life-work. In whatever he afterward did it was the *disciple of Welcker* who did it. It was not, however, a conscious but a natural following of Welcker, for their souls were closely akin. So thoroughly was this realized by his *Fachgenossen*, even through his own pronounced individuality and originality, that, although his career at Bonn was a brief one, they have always spoken of him as the exponent of the *Bonner Schule*. The characteristic of Welcker's teaching was to bring into their proper relation the artists and the poets, and to put an end to the annihilation of the spirit of Greek art by pedantic learnedness. Overbeck's very first published work, that with which at the age of twenty-two he obtained his doctor's degree, was, as it were, a declaration of the school in which he proposed to serve: *de vi et efficacia carminum epici cycli in artis operibus etiam conspicua*.

Two years after his doctorate came his *Habilitation*—at Bonn, of course. During his two years there the directing influence of his old teacher still made itself felt to some extent; but he was growing older now and his own personality was growing stronger. He was no longer led by Welcker, nor was he the spokesman of that school alone, nor of any school. In mythological things he had already started out along the lines laid down by Karl Ottfried Müller in his *Prolegomena zu einer wissenschaftlichen Mythologie*. In art he early combined the characteristics of both Welcker, whose fine judgment was intuitive rather than critical, and of the then rising young Brunn, strictly logical and strictly

critical at every step. Overbeck lays down the principles of his future work in his *Kunstarchäologische Vorlesungen im Anschluss an das akademische Kunstmuseum in Bonn* (1853), with which publication he bade farewell to his first academic position: he is to work as the lover of art, who must first understand and enjoy before he may express any judgment in art matters, and who, in order to understand a work of art, must have examined it from three points of view: (1) historically, (2) subjectively, and (3) technically.

While still Privatdocent in Bonn, Overbeck completed his first work of any considerable size: *Die Bildwerke zum thebischen und troischen Heldenkreis*, which is simply one part of what was planned to be a complete *Gallerie heroischer Bildwerke*, and is an attempt to bring into their proper relations the representations in art of the scenes of Theban and Trojan story and the pictures of the same scenes in literature, and to have them mutually explain one another. An accompanying atlas gives in plates, excellently executed for the time, the most important of the monuments mentioned in his text. But what was characteristic of its author in all his later work is already clearly shown in this: his rare gift of presenting his material in a clear systematic way and of defining sharply what is of first importance and what is secondary. The mass of new material that has been discovered since 1851-3, when that book with its atlas was published, has, of course, left it quite out of date and behind the times. Helbig's *Homerisches Epos aus den Denkmälern erläutert* has grown up in the same field; but the place that Overbeck's book was intended to fill is still unoccupied by any other, and it will probably be the only recognized thing of its kind until Dr. Arthur Schneider, of Leipzig, completes the recasting of it into a new edition or a new work. He has been engaged in an effort at such a recension for the last ten years and has so far succeeded in getting out a portion of his *prolegomena* thereto. When more will come cannot be guessed: *θεῶν ἐν γούνασι κείται*. Overbeck's term as *Privatdocent* was very short; in less than two years after his *Habilitation* came his call to Leipzig. First as *extraordinarius* from 1853-58, and then as *ordinarius* (until his death last winter) he occupied the chair that had stood vacant since Moritz Haupt, Otto Jahn, and Theodor Mommsen in turn had been called from it.

Whereas Brunn had been transferred to Rome, where he spent many years in residence at the Institute, and there, as it were transplanted into new soil, had put down new roots to strengthen his growing greatness, Overbeck's genius, refreshed and invigorated by repeated visits to Italy, attained its greatness in the academic atmosphere. The great desire of his heart—to enjoy a protracted residence in classic lands, a desire the fulfilment of which is to the younger generation of

archæologists an essential to their profession—he never succeeded in realizing. He made many visits to Italy, one to Greece. His travels were invariably undertaken for a definite purpose connected with his scientific work, and he always made the most of them.

In 1893 his pupils the world around joined to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of his professorship in Leipzig, as from a presentiment that the jubilee would never come. He was, since the death of Drobisch and a few other such patriarchs, one of the oldest professors there—not in years of life so much as in years of service. His death was not unexpected, and yet, as in every case where the end is surely approaching, though slowly, the announcement of his death brought with it something of a shock. He had been afflicted with a chronic disease of a mild form, and this, though seeming to yield to a season of treatment at Karlsbad, had undermined his constitution to such an extent that he fell an easy victim to an attack of pericarditis and passed away on the eighth of last November.

Such is in very brief form the outline of his life. His real life, however, is to be read in his work. He was not only a scholar from the beginning, but as a teacher he was still more and still greater. His natural fluency and grace of speech and his artistic instinct gave him a peculiar adaptability for an academic career; he was accounted one of the most finished orators, if not the most finished orator of the University of Leipzig. His lectures—particularly the course he entitled *Führung durch das akademische Gypsmuseum*—used to be attended and enthusiastically received not only by students of philology and archæology, but also by students of law, medicine, theology and philosophy, until in the latter years the ever-narrowing specialization has made such scattering no longer practicable. I have seen it stated that among the older teachers in the *gymnasia* of Saxony scarcely a single one-sided philologist could be found—a teacher of Latin and Greek who confined himself to the language and literature of Greece and Rome and failed to lead his pupils to at least a general comprehension and appreciation of classical perfections in architecture, sculpture and painting, without which the classical training would be but a fragment of a fragment. The Saxon *gymnasia* came to be universally thus manned, and that too without his ever having served upon a board of examiners or having brought any direct influence to bear upon them. It was his peculiar province to interest and inspire. That was felt in his lecture-room, but it was appreciated still better in his seminary. There his austere dignity and formality were laid aside and his whole genial nature with all its wealth and warmth opened up to his chosen few upon whom he looked as intimate friends. Interruption and discussion at any point were invited, and

one could thus explore *ad libitum* the inexhaustible store-house of his knowledge and experience, whether seeking results or methods of reaching results. The two-hour sessions were always too short.

From the beginning it was his endeavor as a scholar and as a teacher not only to work for his *Fachgenossen*, but also to impart to a wider circle the results of his investigations, and to awaken in as many as possible the taste and enjoyment of the beautiful as it is expressed in classic art. From his first years in Leipzig almost to his last, his lectures were not confined to the scientific circles of the university, but the pupils in the Academy of Art in Leipzig looked eagerly forward each year to the summer semester when it was to be their pleasure to receive from his versatile genius a kind of instruction and inspiration different from their every-day exercises. And in the *Kaufmännischer Verein*, where courses of lectures by university professors before a select few were given every winter—a sort of university-extension work—Overbeck was for many years the recognized favorite of all. His very first book, published when he was *Docent* in Bonn, was a descriptive catalogue of the archæological museum in that place, that is, in a way, a historical outline for the general study of ancient sculpture. It thus formed the model for the more elaborate *Bausteine* of Friedrichs, even in its altered form by Wolters. Directly popular is his exhaustive book on Pompeii—now in its fourth edition.

The charm of his books, as of his lectures, lies in his keen appreciation of his subject and the warmth of feeling and the enthusiasm with which he pursues it. If Goethe's words be true: *Nur der Enthusiasmus vermag die Kunst zu erfassen und im Innersten begreifen*, then there have been few greater teachers of art-history than Overbeck. He always spoke and wrote with a fire of inner conviction and with a personal comprehension of the spirit pervading ancient art that could not fail to be communicated to his hearers' souls. One of his fundamental principles was the Hellenic feeling for the beautiful; it was the beautiful that was the vivifying, glorifying element of Greek life. And a marble statue was to his artistic nature not a lifeless subject of scientific investigation merely; but it was the end of a living process—the growth from the idea, expressed in poetry or not, to its interpretation by the hand of the master-artist. In him we have a priest of the true and the beautiful. All this was enhanced by the brilliance of his rhetoric and the clearness and precision with which he discriminated between the essential and the immaterial, and by his keenness in applying familiar principles to what was new and unknown.

We usually expect—and our expectation seldom deceives us—that, as scholars grow old, they fall behind their science and still cling to what was truth when they were young. Overbeck was a rare excep-

tion. No scientist ever was more ready to surrender a long cherished theory than he; none ever kept better pace with the strides his youthful science made. He was fully abreast with the most advanced methods and researches; and of the many problems, large and small, that arose from day to day to block advance, he solved his full share in the numerous essays and articles that have appeared above his name. That same spirit of progress, of wide-awake keeping up with the times, is most patent in the various editions of his *Geschichte der griechischen Plastik*. The first edition appeared in 1857-58, the second in 1870, the third in 1880, and the fourth in 1893-94, each succeeding edition being an entirely different book from the one that preceded it. And one who had used the first and was suddenly introduced to the fourth would scarcely recognize it as the same thing, scarcely even in nature and scope. For the first was made, as the title page declares, *für Künstler und Kunstfreunde*; the fourth (and so also the third) has more the stamp of purely scientific purpose. He felt that in view of the multiplication of material through the endless discoveries of these last decades, in Athens, Olympia, Pergamon, the Islands, such a course was absolutely imperative, and he met the necessity and undertook the task with a fearlessness and overcame the difficulties with a mastery that deserves the highest admiration. And scarcely was the first volume of the fourth edition of the *Plastik* issued, when the French at Delphi and others elsewhere unearthed such an array of early sculptures that Overbeck proceeded at once to make negotiations for a fifth edition, on which work was progressing when he was suddenly called away.

The *Pompeii* has had a very similar history. Edition after edition was demanded; the fourth was about to be exhausted long ago and a fifth was called for, which I believe is now nearing completion in the hands of August Mau. The rapid succession of editions of these two works shows how great a circle of readers Overbeck could reach with books that not only are highly scientific, but also present the subject in a manner to reach even the one who reads for entertainment. In re-editing he was not averse to changing his material, where later investigation had cleared up old difficulties. For that reason every succeeding edition increased in trustworthiness as authority and grew in size, while his unsparing use of the file made more delightful his already masterly style. In the preface to the third edition of the *Plastik* he remarks how difficult he found it then to make proper and adequate use of the new material; how much harder must it have been in the case of the fourth, when that material—at least for the archaic period—had been multiplied, and when his own physical strength and elasticity had so far forsaken him. And that

he could thus face all the new problems (debated this way and that), find a fitting solution for so many of them and finish a work that stands in the high places of archæological research and of art-history, seems to me the most remarkable feature of his whole career.

In his plans of publication it was his aim to follow out some comprehensive lines that would advance his branch of science and be of constant help to his fellows. This too is attributed, whether fairly or not, to Welcker's influence upon him; I doubt it. But be that as it may, the *Bildwerke zum thebischen und troischen Heldenkreis*, his *Schriftquellen zur Geschichte der bildenden Kunst bei den Griechen*, and above all his *Kunstmythologie* are vast treasure-houses—indispensable reference-books to every worker in the fields of classical art and mythology. All Overbeck's books were made to meet a real need. The demand for a book like the *Geschichte der griechischen Plastik* was not lessened by the appearance of Brunn's *Künstlergeschichte*. This work of Brunn, though epoch-making, was only a *Vorarbeit* and made no pretention to be more than this. What was still wanted was a work that would bring together in a comprehensive unity both literary and monumental material for the construction of a complete history of Greek art. This work Overbeck did in the successive editions of the *Plastik*. His fine analyses of style, his calm, unbiassed penetration into the form, significance, and technique of the monuments to be considered, his arrangement of them according to localities as well as according to schools, reduced the history of sculpture to a system and revealed in it an organic connection that had been unseen till then.

The same service he had done for us in a *History of Greek Painting*. This superb work he had already finished—almost ready for the press—when the discoveries on the Acropolis in 1886–89 suddenly turned the whole chronology of vase-painting upside down. Overbeck waited in vain for time in which to revise his manuscript of the part dealing with the painted vases, and, as the time was never found, this—in literary form at least—most perfect of his works must by his will share the fate of all his other unpublished manuscript and be burned.

As to his method of work, Overbeck aimed by careful, accurate description of a work of art to make his impressions clear to himself and to others, meeting objections as he went, careful to avoid preconceived notions but ready to drop any thing that might be shown to be false. With unwearying diligence he worked up the subject of each larger work, publishing, as he went along, a great number of essays and monographs, and inviting the sharpest criticism before the results should be collected and published together. It is due to this method of procedure that so many of his books stand as unassailable authority. The *pièce de resistance* of his last twenty-five years was his *Griechische*

Kunstmythologie—that is, the science that has to do with the representation in art of the Greek divinities and their myths. His plan was to collect from all possible sources—from public museums, private galleries, or, when lost, from mere literary mention—all the monuments bearing upon the gods of Olympian Greece or of Rome, to publish them and explain and criticise them. Without some financial assistance from the outside, such a task, with so many expensive plates, would have been hopeless. Fortunately the *Kgl. sächsisches Cultusministerium* backed the project and the work proceeded. Think of the courage it must have required to undertake a plan like that, for the accomplishment of which the span of one human life could never suffice. And so the most pretentious of all his works remains a torso of five bulky volumes with an atlas of as many more, but a torso that will be a monument to his enterprise and untiring zeal. In it Zeus, Hera, Demeter, Kora, Poseidon and Apollo comprise the parts finished. Artemis was progressing finely, but she with Aphrodite is left uncompleted. It is to be hoped that this exhaustive work will be taken up by one or more of the younger men and carried on toward a possible completion.

Overbeck has lived and labored and taught in a day that, for significance and results, the science of archæology may never see again. The science is but little more than a century old, and the last forty years have seen it stride forward from infancy to maturity. In that period it has, in every department, been established upon new foundations, and new sources have been opened, of which Winckelmann never dreamed. In that period of forty years fall (besides many others of less importance) the excavations at Olympia, Pergamon, the Athenian acropolis, Delphi, and in the Islands of the Aegean; which placed at the world's disposal material that exceeded every thing previously known. His nature peculiarly fitted him to take this mass of newly discovered material and work it into the connected history as it had already been sketched. No sooner were discoveries made than the world was flooded with a mass of expression of opinions, more or less arbitrary explanations or combinations. With an acumen that we can only admire but never comprehend he sifted the wheat from the chaff, separated that which could be then developed and arranged, and cast aside or ignored that which could not.

His good work was, however, not confined to his lectures and his books. One of the principal objects of his care and affection was the University Museum of Plaster Casts. When he went to Leipzig, there was scarcely a cast in the whole Augusteum. Under his fostering care it grew to be one of the best of its kind—not in the number of pieces it contained, but both in its selection and in its arrangement a model

for the purposes of instruction and study of the history of Greek and Roman sculpture. When I was last with him the greatest burden upon his soul was the construction of the new museum building; and the labor of seeing that through and then transplanting the old collection into its new quarters may have had not a little to do with hastening the end of his life.

While he worked with jealous love of his own department, he was a man of broad sympathies and an intensely philanthropic heart. He planted also for the profit of coming generations. The best appreciated accommodations to the student world in Leipzig are the creations of Overbeck. He founded the University Reading-room (*die akademische Lesehalle*), in which any student who is willing to pay three marks a semester for the privilege may have immediate access to upwards of 10,000 journals, including the best dailies, weekly, monthly and quarterly magazines, of science and belles-lettres. The fees all go toward the purchase of journals, and, as the membership is usually very large, the advantages of this institution can easily be appreciated. Another of his measures of pure philanthropy was the establishment of the *Krankencasse der Studenten*. The payment of a mark upon matriculation assures any student of medical care, in case of need, throughout his time of study. He was also instrumental in providing for the pensioning of the subordinate officers and officials of the university, as professors' pensions had already been assured.

The Royal Archæological Seminary is also his creation, and through his efforts it was, as long ago as 1874, made a state institution, the six regular members of which are encouraged to good work by receiving each semester a definite stipend from the state treasury and whatever prizes their virtues may secure besides.

Of the quality of his published work enough has been said. It might not be uninteresting to sum up the quantity: in book-form he published the following:

Katalog des Bonner Museums.

Gallerie heroischer Bildwerke.

Kunstarchäologische Vorlesungen im Anschluss an das akademische Kunstmuseum in Bonn.

Pompeii, in seinen Gebäuden, Alterthümern und Kunstwerken dargestellt. 4 editions.

Geschichte der griechischen Plastik. 2 volumes. 4 editions.

Abbildungen aus der Gesch. der gr. Plastik, zum Gebrauch in Vorlesungen zusammengestellt.

Die archäologische Sammlung der Universität Leipzig.

Die antiken Schriftquellen zur Geschichte der bildenden Künste bei den griechen.

Griechische Kunstmythologie. 5 volumes and atlas.

Offener Brief an die Bonner Studenten.

Die römische Villa bei Weingarten.

These twenty-two volumes, taking into account only the latest editions of those works that have gone through more than one edition, aggregate over 5,600 printed pages with over 1,000 illustrations large and small.

To give a list of his contributions to scientific journals would take too long; there are no less than 60 titles that I know of, and these probably do not exhaust the list, with contents aggregating some 2,000 pages more, with many more illustrations to accompany these.

Overbeck was not a fast worker. But he was a hard worker, as the magnitude and quality of his published work will amply testify. His name has gone abroad far beyond the limits of his own science, and it means for the history of ancient art all that Lübke's name does for the history of later art, and, to those who knew and loved him, more.

WALTER MILLER.